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FROM THE U.S. MISSION TO THE UN AGENCIES IN ROME

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SUBJECT: FAO EMERGENCY PROGRAMS: AVIAN INFLUENZA AND THE RISK  
OF EXPANSION

REF: (A) ROME 1142; (B) ROME 0877; (C) STATE 153802

11. Summary. With the potential risk that the Avian Influenza (AI) deadly sub-virus H5N1 may be transported via the migratory flyways of wild water fowl from South Asia to the Middle East and Europe, the activities of the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to stamp out AI are receiving much needed attention. On September 2, FAO Director General Jacques Diouf chaired a briefing on the risk of AI expansion and preventive measures FAO is taking, and took the opportunity to launch an emergency appeal for \$25 million to build surveillance capacity and research on wildlife. Earlier that week, USUN Rome staff accompanied USAID/Global Health's Dr. Dennis Carroll to a meeting with FAO Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) and Animal Production and Health Division (AGAD) staff to fine-tune an FAO proposal to strengthen early warning and early reaction to Avian Influenza outbreaks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, PR China and Viet Nam. USUN Rome has been covering FAO's AI activities and will continue to widely disseminate discussions with FAO. End Summary

12. Background: FAO and its collaborating partners, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Office International des Epizooties (OIE, or World Organization for Animal Health), have been actively involved in a campaign to contain and stamp out Avian Influenza (AI) in Asia. The three agencies took collaborative, immediate action since the outbreaks first occurred in late 2003/early 2004. Among their many efforts, joint guidelines and recommendations were issued on the control of AI, and a global framework was launched [FAO/OIE Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Trans-boundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs)].

13. Diouf stated that AI is becoming more a matter of concern to nations around the globe as the threat of imminent spread reaches the doorsteps of Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa via the complex overlapping of major migratory bird flyways. The international focus has largely been on the human side, but Diouf emphasized that up to now, it has been an animal disease and, therefore, must be stopped at the source. Diouf noted that WHO has been successful in garnering "100 percent support" from nations to purchase preventive equipment on the human health side, but the need now is for nations to refocus their attention on animals, ensuring that policy decisions address AI as a problem of animals. He called upon donors to support FAO activities in this endeavor.

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The Role of Wild Birds  
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14. Dr. Joseph Domenech, Chief, FAO Animal Health Service, stated that the AI virus has always circulated in wildlife, but this year's situation is much more significant in that past precursors have changed with the massive deaths of wild birds in China. In addition, AI exposure has spread to Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. Animal health experts are

still trying to determine the role wild birds play in the spread of the disease. What is certain, however, is that wild birds represent a reservoir for AI viruses. Many of these birds are migratory and travel long distances, carrying the threat with them as they cross international borders. In addition, certain species of ducks carry viruses without exhibiting any clinical signs of the disease. Because many of these fowl share common watering sources with poultry in rural farms, the interaction of the virus and risks of human transmission are high. Because of migratory patterns, it is hard to predict which country will be next to report an outbreak. More information can be found on FAO's Web site at: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/>

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FAO's Current Activities and Emergency Appeal  
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15. FAO committed \$5 million of its Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) funds to assist in the build-up of regional capacity and surveillance. It launched three networks to improve diagnosis and disease information in 23 countries. FAO and OIE continue to work to update international notification requirements on poultry and fowl. A Geneva-based OIE expert who was present at the briefing noted the difficulties in enforcing the reporting requirements on wildlife: wildlife does not yet affect trade, and thus nations fail to report problems.

16. FAO took the opportunity with donors to launch an emergency response appeal for \$25 million, which is in addition to the \$100 million that FAO will need for its three-year phased disease control program. The emergency fund will cover research on and surveying of wildlife; mobilization of the OIE/FAO Avian Influenza Network (OFFLU); increased national emergency preparedness and laboratory upgrading and regional coordination in South Asia, Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe through various regional organizations; and, under the OIE/FAO GF-TADs, increased international coordination, including the development of the Global Early Warning System (GLEWS) to enable better analysis and disease intelligence. The emergency operations funding mechanism is being used as a nimble way for FAO to launch within 24 hours an emergency response in an affected country.

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USAID Support to FAO and USG Global Plan  
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17. On August 31, preliminary discussions with USAID/Global Health's Dr. Dennis Carroll and FAO Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) and Animal Production and Health Division (AGAD) staff culminated with the fine-tuning of an FAO proposal to strengthen early warning and early reaction to AI outbreaks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, People's Republic of China and Viet Nam. Of the \$25 million appropriated to USAID and HHS/CDC in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror and Tsunami Relief of

2005, Dr. Carroll stated that a down payment of \$6 million will go to FAO as a prime implementing partner for activities related to animal health.

18. Dr. Carroll expounded that, in July 2005, he visited Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, three of the highest-risk countries for H5N1 outbreaks, as part of a USG interagency team (USAID, USDA, State and HHS/CDC), to investigate existing platforms and determine what has been done nationally and regionally to counter the spread of AI. The team was impressed by FAO's strong and demonstrated presence in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and its active regional program in Bangkok, which will provide an opportunity for the immediate role-out and expansion of activities in adherence to the USG's global plan to build on existing platforms.

19. Since the \$25 million appropriation in June 2005, the USG's global plan has been adapted to respond to country specific needs. This revised plan, entitled "U.S. Government Emergency Response to Avian Influenza," outlines country specific lines of action to be supported by the U.S. over the coming year; identifies implementing and technical assistance partners; and provides a country-specific budget through September 2006. Three key "operating principles" were used in developing these country-specific plans:

-- Focus on activities that could contribute immediately to the containment of H5N1;

-- Build on already existing platforms and capabilities; and

-- Promote a comprehensive and well-coordinated response covering animal and human infection.

110. USUN Rome will continue to cover and widely disseminate information on FAO AI activities.

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